

# WOMEN IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES 1945-80

Since 1945 it has become commonplace for international planners and policy makers to view education as a panacea for social and economic problems. In 1975, International Women's Year, the United Nations, addressing itself to improving the status of women, stated that education was

*the most effective channel for achieving equality between men and women and ensuring the full participation of women in development...<sup>1</sup>*

Since then most western countries have enacted anti-discrimination legislation and publicly committed themselves to policies of equal pay and equal opportunity in employment. Such commitment has engendered an increasing volume of research on the unequal status of women in the home, workplace and education. If education is the key to improvement in social status, then it is salutary now to ask what progress women have made towards equality with men in education itself, and to relate this to a wider social context.

This paper concentrates only on university education and examines changes in the participation of women and changes in the proportions of men and women at all levels of university education in Australia since World War Two. In general terms there has been a significant increase in the numbers of women participating, and in the proportion of women to men, at all levels of university education in the post war period. This period contrasts markedly with the long period of stasis in female participation rates between 1920-1950, where the percentage of female university students hovered around twenty per cent at the beginning and end of the period<sup>2</sup> (with a slight relative increase in the war years).

In economic terms the period 1920-1940 is one of slow growth when annual increases of GDP did not exceed 2.2 per cent and where there were intervals of negative growth.<sup>3</sup> The years 1945-1975 were a period of boom; annual rates of growth in GDP averaged 4.4 per cent,<sup>4</sup> making possible a high level of federal funding for universities. Since 1975 with the end of the long boom, federal funding has contracted, and the period of marked expansion for universities is over. Are we now entering another period of stasis for women in universities? Will the increased participation be maintained or gradually diminish?

In examining female participation in the university

## JENNIFER M. JONES and JOSIE CASTLE

University of Wollongong

sector the most noticeable feature is the absolute increase of numbers and the relative narrowing of the discrepancy between males and females at all levels, though most obviously at the lowest levels of undergraduates and junior staff. In the 30 years 1950-1980 women increased their share of bachelor enrolments from 18.3 per cent to 43.9 per cent; of postgraduate enrolments from 6.9 per cent to 28 per cent; of academic staffing from 11.9 per cent in 1961 to 16.2 per cent in 1980.

At bachelor level female enrolments increased from 4,352 in 1950<sup>5</sup> to 56,955 in 1980. In the period 1955-1970 the increase for females was nearly double the rate for males: 552 per cent as against 274 per cent (see Table 1). The upsurge of feminine enrolments no doubt reflects changes in the career aspirations of women, in work force participation rates, and in social expectations of women as wives and mothers.<sup>6</sup>

TABLE 1  
ENROLMENTS, BACHELOR'S DEGREES, 1945-1980

Year	Males		Females		Total N	% Total	Ratio: Males/ Females
	N	%	N	%			
1945	8,163	69.0	3,664	31.0	11,827	100	2.2:1
1950	19,376	81.7	4,352	18.3	23,728	100	4.5:1
1955	16,960	78.7	4,579	21.3	21,539	100	3.7:1
1960	30,182	77.1	8,984	22.9	39,166	100	3.4:1
1965	51,552	69.8	17,989	30.2	59,540	100	2.9:1
1970	63,492	68.0	29,865	32.0	93,357	100	2.1:1
1975	74,793	62.3	45,326	37.7	120,119	100	1.6:1
1980	73,709	56.1	56,955	43.9	129,664	100	1.3:1

ENROLMENTS, HIGHER DEGREES, 1945-1980

Year	Males		Females		Total N	% Total	Ratio: Males/ Females
	N	%	N	%			
1945	90	60.0	36	40.0	126	100	2.5:1
1950	436	87.9	60	12.1	496	100	7.3:1
1955	923	90.0	103	10.0	1,026	100	9.0:1
1960	2,407	86.9	363	13.1	2,770	100	6.6:1
1965	5,238	84.9	931	15.1	6,169	100	5.6:1
1970	9,648	83.5	1,901	16.5	11,549	100	5.0:1
1975	13,044	78.2	3,632	21.8	16,676	100	3.6:1
1980	14,807	72.0	5,767	28.0	20,574	100	2.6:1

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Staff and Students, 1945-1980.

But its coincidence with increased levels of federal funding, and the expansion of the numbers of Australian universities from six to nineteen, suggests that significant improvement in the life chances of women is a result of the sustained growth in the national economy in the thirty years after the war.

Female bachelor enrolments doubled in the decade 1950-1960 (to 8,984) and doubled again in the next five years, to 17,989 in 1965, the highest rate of increase for any five year period (see Table 1). The improved participation rate for females is not evident until 1955, and is most marked by 1965, a period commensurate with the heightened federal commitment following the Murray Report and the increase in the numbers of Australian universities to 13 in 1966.

Women have also improved their position relative to men, despite large increases in the numbers of male bachelor enrolments. In 1950, for every female bachelor degree conferred there were 4.8 male degrees; in 1960 the ratio was 1:3.4; in 1970, 1:2.5, and by 1980, 1:1.4 (see Table 2).

TABLE 2  
DEGREES CONFERRED BY YEAR AND SEX, 1945-1980  
Doctorates

Year	Males		Females		Total N	% Total	Ratio: Males/ Females
	N	%	N	%			
1945	17	100.0	0	0	17	100	—
1950	42	93.3	3	6.7	45	100	14:1
1955	92	91.1	9	8.9	101	100	10:1
1960	148	93.1	11	6.9	159	100	13.4:1
1965	287	91.7	26	8.3	313	100	11:1
1970	602	91.0	61	9.0	663	100	9.9:1
1975	703	88.3	93	11.7	796	100	7.6:1
1980	721	81.3	166	18.7	887	100	4.3:1

Master's

Year	Males		Females		Total N	% Total	Ratio: Males/ Females
	N	%	N	%			
1945	109	79.6	28	20.4	137	100	3.9:1
1950	166	86	27	14	193	100	6:1
1955	148	86.5	23	13.5	170	100	6.4:1
1960	223	87.8	31	12.2	254	100	7.2:1
1965	394	83.0	81	17.0	475	100	4.9:1
1970	751	85.0	137	15.0	888	100	5.5:1
1975	1,308	83.9	252	16.1	1,560	100	5.2:1
1980	1,557	74.4	537	25.6	2,094	100	2.9:1

Bachelor's

Year	Males		Females		Total N	% Total	Ratio: Males/ Females
	N	%	N	%			
1945	875	65.9	453	34.1	1,328	100	1.9:1
1950	3,513	82.6	738	17.4	4,251	100	4.8:1
1955	2,490	79.4	647	20.6	3,137	100	3.8:1
1960	3,229	77.0	963	23.0	4,192	100	3.4:1
1965	5,857	74.5	2,002	25.5	7,859	100	2.9:1
1970	9,684	71.9	3,800	28.1	13,484	100	2.5:1
1975	14,033	64.0	7,877	36.0	21,910	100	1.8:1
1980	15,199	58.8	10,660	41.2	25,859	100	1.4:1

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Staff and Students, 1945-1980.

In all of the above comparisons 1950 is the starting point of the five year series rather than 1945. Enrolments and graduations in 1945 reflect the absence

of men either for service in the armed forces or because of manpower restrictions on civilian labour; thus the relative position of females shows startling improvement. In 1945, for every female bachelor's degree conferred there were 2.2 male degrees, a ratio never achieved before the war years, and not again until 1970. (See Table 1). Enrolments for higher degrees show the same distortion in 1945 (male/female ratio, 5:2). But even the war did not eradicate the pattern of female under-representation.

This pattern is even more marked at honours level, where females do not maintain the same improvement. It is difficult to obtain figures for honours degrees broken down by sex in the postwar period, either from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) or from individual universities,<sup>7</sup> which makes comment on long run trends at best speculative. Occasionally there are sample studies for individual years, e.g. 1970 and 1973 (see Table 3). Using these as a guide, some estimation of postwar trends and male/female relativities can be made. It seems that female gains at bachelor level are more faintly reflected at honours level. The under-representation of females in postgraduate enrolments lends some weight to this argument.

TABLE 3  
HONOURS DEGREES CONFERRED, MALES AND FEMALES, SELECTED FIELDS  
1970

Field of Study	Males		Females		Total N	% Total
	N	%	N	%		
Arts*	459	55.9	362	44.1	821	100
Humanities	0	0	1	100	1	100
Law	59	84.3	11	15.7	70	100
Commerce	46	93.9	3	6.1	49	100
Medicine/Surgery	67	83.7	13	16.3	80	100
Education	2	100	0	0	2	100
Science	711	80.3	174	19.7	885	100
Total	1,344	70.4	564	29.6	1,908	100

\*Pass Degrees F 1912; M 1480.

The A.B.S. Statistical Categories often change, e.g. in 1973, social work and social science are labelled Social and Behavioural Science. Thus comparisons may not be

precise and should be interpreted cautiously. The figures used are for first, second and third class honours (A.B.S. figures do separate the firsts, but place seconds and thirds in the one category).

In 1970 women gained only 29.6 per cent of all honours bachelor's degrees and 27.2 per cent in 1973 (see Table 3). Even in Arts, where females took the majority of pass degrees (1,912 as against 1,480 for the males) they gained only 44 per cent of honours degrees. In Science (19.7 per cent), Law (15.7 per cent) and Commerce (6.1 per cent), women were only a small proportion of the honours graduates. Despite increases in female participation rates overall, they were not proceeding to honours degrees at the same rate, at least in the early '70s.

Another factor which affects the proportion of female honours graduates is the distribution of females across faculties. It is well established that women confine their studies to certain subject areas, and that this pattern begins at secondary level.<sup>8</sup> At university they cluster in Arts and Social Science and are most markedly absent from fields like Engineering. This pattern of female concentration is the same in broad outline for the whole postwar period. In 1980, as in 1950, most female university students enrolled in Arts: 2,520 of the 4,352 female enrolments were in Arts. The 1980 figures show 9,064 out of 20,276.<sup>9</sup> But in 1950 there were proportionately fewer females enrolled in the behavioural sciences and education. (See Table 4.)

There have been substantial changes in the proportion of females to males within faculties. In Arts, women have moved from the minority, 38 per cent, to the majority, 63 per cent, of students. In 1980, as in 1950, they are in a minority in all other fields, but the relative proportions have altered. In Medicine, women have moved from 12.4 per cent of students to a substantial 39 per cent. In Law, from 5 per cent to 34.7 per cent. In no faculty has the female proportion decreased:

Table 4  
Female Enrolments by Faculty\*

	1950: %	1980: %
Arts	38	63
Law	5	34.7
Commerce	17.6	26
Education	21	65.6
Science	12.4	36
Medicine	12.4	39
Engineering	.04	4.7

\*adapted from figures in ABS: *University Statistics* 1950, 1980.

In Law, women are just over one third of students, compared with one twentieth in 1950. In Science, the increase is from just over one tenth to just over one third. Despite this more even faculty mix, there is still a heavy concentration of female talent in certain fields, making competition in these areas tougher, and probably causing a greater number of promising women to drop out. As already noted, very few women are proceeding to honours in these

fields. Indeed, there is no faculty where women exercise a monopoly at honours level as do men, for example, in Engineering. Even in Arts, women face stiff competition not only from other women, but from males.

The skewed distribution of females across faculties means a smaller pool of good honours graduates to provide candidates for postgraduate training; but the numbers of women enrolling for higher degrees has nevertheless increased since 1945. In 1980 women took 41.2 per cent of bachelor's degrees and 23.6 per cent of higher degrees; in 1950 the percentages were 17.4 per cent and 12.2 per cent respectively (see Tables 1 and 2). The rate of increase of female participation at both levels is therefore similar — more than double at each level. The net result for women is much less significant at higher degree level because of the much smaller starting base.

Men have never taken less than 75 per cent of master's degrees, or 81 per cent of doctorates conferred by Australian Universities in any year since 1945 (Table 5). As Over<sup>10</sup> remarks, of all master's degrees and doctorates awarded in Australia since the 1940s, men have gained more than 80 per cent and 90 per cent respectively. In 1945 there were no female doctorates, but 20 per cent of master's degrees went to females. In 1955, the percentage was only a little higher (23 per cent), and represents a drop from 1950 (27 per cent).

TABLE 5  
DEGREES CONFERRED BY YEAR AND SEX, 1945-1980

Year	DOCTORATES		MASTER'S		BACHELOR'S	
	Males %	Females %	Males %	Females %	Males %	Females %
1945	100	0	79.6	20.4	65.9	34.1
1950	93.3	6.7	86	14	82.6	17.4
1955	91.1	8.9	86.5	13.5	79.4	20.6
1960	93.1	6.9	87.8	12.2	77	23
1965	91.7	8.3	83	17	74.5	25.5
1970	91	9	85	15	71.9	28.1
1975	88.3	11.7	83.9	16.1	64	36
1980	81.3	18.7	74.4	25.6	58.8	41.2

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, University Statistics, Staff and Students, 1945-1980.

Arguably, 1945 and 1950 reflect the enrolment patterns of wartime when women took up their studies in unusual circumstances — the relative absence of men, the increased importance of women as workers in a period of desperate labour shortages, the lifting of some occupational and familial restrictions on women, and an enhanced social status. These temporary alterations to the social environment provided some women with wider career choices and altered views of participation in the workforce.

The female percentage of master's degrees remains at about 14 per cent until 1960, where there is a drop to 12.2 per cent, despite an absolute increase in enrolments. In 1965 there is an increase to 17 per

cent, and a substantial increase to 25.6 per cent in 1980 (see Table 2).

There are, therefore, substantial gains for women at master's level, but the implications for the status of women must be treated with caution since the increase in the female share took place at a time when the value of master's degrees was declining, being overtaken by the rising prestige of the Ph.D. as a qualification for an academic career. It is possible, that the master's field became more open to females because of male desertion.

In 1980, 18.7 per cent of doctorates went to women, treble their percentage share in 1950 (6.7 per cent) (see Table 2). The growth in the female share at doctoral level is more uneven than growth at masters level. In 1955, the female share of doctorates grew to 8.9 per cent, but fell in 1960 to 6.9 per cent, in effect back to 1950 levels. And in the fifteen years 1950-1965, women made slow progress at doctoral level. The five years 1975-1980 was the time of greatest growth; women doubled their percentage share to 18.7 per cent. Most of the increase comes in the five years 1975-1980 (11.7 per cent in 1975).

Levels of participation at postgraduate level are important in determining access to university teaching positions. Over argues that the current ratio of women to men academics matches the participation rates of the two sexes in postgraduate training in Australia since the war.<sup>11</sup> This argument needs qualification, as the following table shows.

Table 6  
Women as % of Academic Staff in Australian Universities and as % of Doctorates and Master's Degrees Conferred: 1960-1980

	1960	1961	1965	1970	1975	1980
Staff	—	11.9	12.5	13.6	17.8	16.2
Doctorates	6.9	10.4	8.3	9.0	11.7	18.7
Masters	12.2	9.1	17.0	15.0	16.1	25.6
Doctorates & Masters	10.2	9.5	13.6	12.8	14.6	23.6

Note: In comparing staffing levels with higher degrees awarded in Australia, there is an assumption that staff are largely recruited from Australian trained postgraduates. Over (*op. cit.*, p. 169) cites evidence that this has been the pattern of staff recruitment, with some input from overseas.

Source: ABS Statistics, 1960, 1961, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980.

The match is by no means perfect, for men hold relatively more staff positions compared with their share of postgraduate degrees, and while this was true for women in 1961, 1970 and 1975, it was not true in 1965, 1978 and 1980. Other variables, however, ensure that the correlation is not perfect. First, staffing levels reflect the reality of much earlier periods, since the age of most staff is between 35 and 50.<sup>12</sup> Second, in the 60s and early 70s, some staff at tutor, and even lecturer level, were recruited with good honours degrees, because of the demand created by an unprecedented growth in enrolments.

In the decade 1960-1970, enrolments for all degrees increased two and a half times, compared with 1.7 times in the decade before, and 1.4 times in

the decade 1970-1980.<sup>13</sup>

With or without higher degrees, women were mainly recruited to university staff at junior levels, especially as tutors. Thus, in 1961, 46.7 per cent of all female university staff were tutors, 39.7 per cent in 1970, and 30.7 per cent in 1980.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the period, around 10 per cent of all male staff were tutors (1961: 10.3 per cent; 1980: 8.6 per cent).<sup>15</sup> A greater proportion of female than male staff now cluster at the next lowest grade that of lecturer, which probably accounts for the declining proportion of women at tutorial level. In 1980 a report from the University of Melbourne showed that 83.5 per cent of female staff were at lecturer level or below. Only 43.5 per cent of male staff were in this category. A higher percentage of female staff is untenured, 71.6 per cent, compared with 37.5 per cent of males, that is three times as many men than women had tenure.<sup>16</sup>

The tendency for female staff to cluster at the lower levels has been a marked trend since 1961, and therefore the decline in the percentage of female staff from the all-time peak of 17.5 per cent in 1975 to 16.2 per cent in 1980 is probably directly attributable to the cutbacks in tertiary education funding, which have hit hardest at tutorial levels. The downward trend began in 1978 and is unlikely to be arrested in the foreseeable future, despite increased female participation at postgraduate level. There is still a heavy imbalance between female participation at the lowest level of the university hierarchy, bachelor enrolments, and their representation on the staff.

In 1980 women were 43.6 per cent of bachelor enrolments and 16.2 per cent of staff. Men made up 56 per cent of bachelor enrolments and 83.8 per cent of staff. Given the economic recession and cutbacks in tertiary funding it is unlikely that these relativities will alter in favour of females in the immediate future.

### Conclusion

The long term trend since World War II shows increased female participation at all levels of university education, but there are still heavy imbalances of male/female numbers at all levels: least at the bottom — undergraduates; greatest at the top — professors. The reasons for increased participation are complex, but the main cause of the rapidly rising female participation rates appears to be the long boom itself.

The low and unchanging levels of female participation in the period of poor economic growth, 1920-1940, strengthens this argument. In the eighties the effects of the recession which began in 1975 are already apparent in lowered female staffing levels, although bachelor enrolments are holding. As the recession deepens, will other gains be maintained? It seems doubtful that education can be "a channel for achieving equality" between men and women without the cushion of economic growth, and when

even the heightened participation rates since 1945 have not brought the same improvement to the status of women in society at large.

#### References

1. Cited in E. Byrne, *Women and Education*, Tavistock, London, 1978, p. 11.
2. Sydney University Union, *Recorder*, July 1982.
3. E. Boehm, *Twentieth Century Economic Development in Australia*, Longman, 1971.
4. *ibid.*
5. 1945 figures are excluded from the long term comparisons because of the relative absence of men in wartime.
6. J. Jones and F. Lovejoy, "The perceived role of Australian female academics", *The ANZ Journal of Sociology*, 16, 1980, pp. 97, 98.
7. Sydney University does not have figures for male/female honours degrees until 1980.
8. J. O'Neill, "Women in Biological Sciences in Victorian Universities in 1981: An attempt at Perspectives", ANZAAS paper, May 1982, is a recent study confirming this.
9. ABS, *University Statistics 1950-1980*, AGPS, Canberra.

10. R. Over, "Women Academics in Australian Universities", *Australian Journal of Education*, 25, 2, 1981, p. 170.

11. *ibid.*, p. 170.

12. *ibid.*, p. 174.

13. Enrolments, all degrees:

1950	1960	1970	1980
24,224	41,836	108,906	151,238

ABS *University Statistics*, 1950-1980.

14. *ibid.*, 1961, 1980.

15. *Table a  
Teaching and Research Staff, Universities*

Tutors etc.	Males		Females		Male Staff	Female Staff
	Total	Tutors	Total			
	No.	%	No.	%		
1961	301	10.2	2,952	100	187	46.7
1964	501	12.3	4,063	100	245	42.8
1970	793	12.5	6,366	100	398	39.7
1980	770	8.6	8,983	100	534	30.7
					1,739	100

Source: ABS *University Statistics*, 1963, 1964, 1970, 1980.  
16. Melbourne University, Sectional Report No. 3, 1980: "Women Academics in the University, 1974-79".

## THE UNIVERSITY VISITOR: A GUEST FROM ANOTHER AGE

George Szlawski

Senior Industrial Officer  
Health Commission of Victoria  
(Formerly FAUSA Industrial Officer)

ment in the Court of Kings Bench but which was subsequently approved by the House of Lords when reversing the judgement of that Court, stated:

*The office of Visitor by the common law is to judge according to the statutes of the college and to expel and deprive upon just occasions and to hear appeals of course. And from him and him only the party grieved ought to have redress; and in him the founder hath reposed so entire confidence that he will administer justice impartially that his determinations are final and examinable in no other Court whatsoever.<sup>3</sup>*

In substance the English Courts still follow the gravement of that statement. In more recent times the law pertaining to Visitors was consolidated and enlarged upon by Sir Richard Kingersy V.C. in the case of Thomson and University of London.<sup>4</sup>

*Whatever relates to the internal arrangements and dealings with regard to the government and management of the house, of the domus, of the institutions is properly within the jurisdiction of the Visitor, and only under the jurisdiction of the Visitor and this Court will not intervene in those matters; but when it comes to a question of right of property, or rights as between the University and a third person dehors the University, or with regard, it may be, to a breach of trust committed by the corporation that is the University, and so on, or any contracts by the corporation, not being matters relating to the mere management and arrangement and details of their domus then indeed this Court will interfere.<sup>5</sup>*

From these two quotations, but especially from the latter, a number of conclusions can be drawn about the extent of the visitorial jurisdiction before the beginning of the 20th century.

- In the beginning, only a member of the corporation can instigate a complaint or appeal. Thus, in the first instance, the jurisdiction of the Visitor is confined to questions arising between members of the corporation and cannot be invoked in any disputes arising between corporations and non-corporations. This is established law and is stated, among others, by Bridge.<sup>6</sup>

*Visitorial jurisdiction is therefore essentially limited to corporations and does not extend to other persons within or outside the corporation.*

Thus, for example, a dispute between a laboratory technician and the university that employs him cannot be settled by a Visitor but recourse must be made to the appropriate court.<sup>7</sup>

Australian universities, being largely modelled on their British counterparts, have in the majority of cases acquired the office of University Visitor. The purpose of this paper is to examine the need, the implications and the extent of recourse to the Visitor in Australian universities so that an opinion can be formed about the usefulness of this office.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The function had its origins in the remote past as an essential ingredient of the Constitutions of eleemosynary institutions which appear to be one of the earliest examples of corporate identities. The distinction between eleemosynary and other types of corporations was succinctly summarised by Sheldford in his *Law of Mortmain*<sup>1</sup> as follows:

*Lay corporations are again subdivided into two classes, eleemosynary and civil. Eleemosynary corporations are such as are constituted for the perpetual distribution of the free alms, or bounty of the founder of them, to such persons as he has directed. These are of two general descriptions; hospitals for the maintenance and relief of poor and impotent persons; and colleges for the promotion of learning, and the support of persons engaged in literary pursuits; of which the greater number are within the Universities, being corporations within a corporation of which they form a component part; and other colleges are out of the Universities and are not necessarily connected with them.*

It is unclear exactly when the divisions between various corporations occurred but the differences were well established in England at the beginning of the 19th century so that ecclesiastical and eleemosynary corporations were subject to visitation whereas other lay corporations were not. A further difference that can be observed between the two kinds of corporations subject to the Visitor's jurisdiction can be seen in the type of a person appointed to that office. Whereas the ecclesiastical corporations followed the established hierarchy, the eleemosynary corporations left the identity of the Visitor up to the legislator who passed the enabling legislation.

This is but a brief historical outline of the rise of the visitorial jurisdiction. Any such historical synopsis would be incomplete, however, without a review of the early cases which shaped the extent of the Visitor's Office.

One of the earliest cases to define the powers of a Visitor was Phillips and Bury.<sup>2</sup> Sir John Holt J.C., in a judgement which was actually a dissenting judge-